Were the Prophecies of Daniel 2 and 7 fulfilled before the Birth of Christ? - The Christian Thinker

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The End Times is one of the most popular topics in many Christian circles. Within eschatology (the study of the end times), the prophecies found in the book of Daniel are some of the most important. It is in this book that we find two chapters, 2 and 7, which are at the heart of the debate concerning the Antichrist and the return of Jesus.

These chapters teach about four kingdoms that will emerge throughout history. It is after these that Christ sets up his kingdom, which will endure forever. The four kingdoms are presented in chapter 2 as five sections of a giant statue, while in chapter 7, they are presented as four different beasts that emerge from the sea.

They are believed to be the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, and the Greek Empires, while the last empire is seen as either the Roman Empire or the Islamic Caliphate, with the former being the most popular. (I have written other essays [*here* and *here*] about this).

However, another interpretation of these kingdoms is not generally accepted among conservative Christians. This view teaches us that the four kingdoms are Babylon, the Median Empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, and finally the Greeks. This means that Daniel 2 and 7 were fulfilled over two thousand years ago before the birth of Christ.

Most of the scholars who accept this are liberal. They believe that Greece is the fourth kingdom because they have accepted that the book of Daniel was not written by Daniel (around the year 530 BC), but by someone hundreds of years later (in the mid-100s BC). They believe this because multiple chapters give us prophecies about future events. For example, chapter 11 clearly gives us a look at the Greek empire with amazing details. These details are so precise that it is believed that someone living after these events must have written them down.

Thus, the fourth kingdom in Daniel 2 and 7 must be Greece and not a future empire like Rome or Islam. They believe this simply because of a naturalistic viewpoint, that is, a supernatural power does not exist (or chooses not to perform miracles), so foreseeing the future is impossible.

Interestingly, there are a few conservative scholars who have come to accept that Greece is the fourth kingdom, although they still accept the traditional dating of Daniel. This essay will look at whether or not this theory is feasible. Is the traditional view of Daniel 2 and 7 incorrect? Were the prophecies of Daniel 2 and 7 fulfilled before the birth of Christ?

Major Interpretations of the kingdoms of Daniel 2 and 7

Daniel 2	Daniel 7	Roman View	Islamic View	Greek View
Head of Gold	Lion with the wings of an eagle	Babylonian Empire	Babylonian Empire	Babylonian Empire (Nebuchadnezzar only)
Chest and Arms of Silver	Bear	Medo-Persian Empire	Medo-Persian Empire	Median Empire
Belly and Thighs of Bronze	A leopard with four heads and wings	Greek Empire	Greek Empire	Medo-Persian Empire
Legs of Iron	Terrifying Beast	Roman Empire	Islamic Caliphate	Greek Empire (primarily Alexander)
Feet and Toes of Clay and Iron	Ten Horns	Revived Roman Empire	Revived Islamic Caliphate	Divisions of the Greek Empire

The First and Second Kingdoms

The first kingdom of Daniel, portrayed as a head of gold in chapter 2 and as a winged lion in chapter 7, is seen as Babylon by practically everyone. Those who follow the Greek theory believe that it stands only for Nebuchadnezzar since 2:38 says that Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold. This is taken to say that the kings of Babylon after him are not included in the first kingdom.

It is with the second beast that major differences emerge. The belief is that the bear, with the chest and arms of silver, is the Median Empire. The Median Empire (c. 678 – 549 BC) was a kingdom founded by the Medes, a people from northern Iran. They created an empire that was largely contemporary with the Babylonian Empire (it began before the rise of Babylon). The Medes are mentioned in the Bible, and they would be a major part of the infamous Medo-Persian Empire of biblical fame. The evidence cited for the Medes as the second kingdom are as follows:

1. Media was the empire in existence after the death of Nebuchadnezzar (remember that it is thought that only Nebuchadnezzar was the first king/kingdom). The Median Empire was at the height of its power between the death of Nebuchadnezzar and the rise of Cyrus the Persian (the third kingdom). This was only a brief period of about 12 or so years. Media was, therefore, a short-lived kingdom that ruled between Nebuchadnezzar (the first kingdom) and Cyrus (the beginning of the third kingdom). The mention of Darius the Mede in Daniel 6 *before* Cyrus is also seen as positive evidence for this.[1]
2. Its history was divided into a period of weakness and strength. This is believed to be the meaning of Daniel 7:5, which states that the bear is raised on one side. The side that is raised is the period after Nebuchadnezzar, while the lower side is after the rise of Cyrus (as the Medes are part of the *Medo*-Persian Empire).[2]
3. The Median Empire fits very well with various details that Daniel gives us about the second empire: A) 2:39 tells us that the second kingdom is inferior to Babylon. The Median Empire was not as glorious as Babylon, but the Medo-Persian Empire (traditionally thought to be the second kingdom) was much greater than Babylon. B) the brief mention of the second kingdom in Daniel 2:39. It is passed over quickly (see #1 above), and C) the third kingdom is said to rule the whole earth in 2:39 which fits Medo-Persia very well. It was the largest empire in history at that time and is still the largest empire in history when it comes to its population percentage compared to the rest of the

world (it had almost half of the world population within its borders at that time).[3]

4. Jeremiah 51:27-29 records for us three nations that are to come against Babylon with the Medes: Ararat (Urartu), Minni (Mannaea), and Ashkenaz (the Scythians). All three of these kingdoms were conquered by the Medes. This corresponds well with the three ribs in the mouth of the bear in Daniel 7. The ribs have been interpreted as three conquered nations.[4]

The Median Empire. Source: Wikipedia.org.

The Third Kingdom

The next empire is believed to be the Medo-Persian Empire instead of Greece. First. It is symbolized as a leopard with four heads and four wings in Daniel 7:6. The symbol of a leopard is said to fit very well with Cyrus the Great's swift conquests. He would expand the Medo-Persian Empire very quickly.[5]

Second, the four heads and wings have been given different meanings: a) the four cardinal directions (the conquests of Persia expanded in all four directions); b) the four heads are the four kings of Persia mentioned in Daniel 11:2.

An argument that traditionalists put forth in favor of the leopard being Greece is that the goat in Daniel 8 has one prominent horn that splits into four horns. Alexander is seen as the large horn, and the four horns after him are the four generals who split up his empire after his death. It is thought by most commentators on Daniel that the four horns of chapter 8 and the four heads of chapter 7 are the same. However, those who believe that the leopard is Persia look at the four heads as a symbol of strength whereas the horns in chapter 8 are seen as a sign of weakness. Thus, in their view, the horns are completely unrelated.[6]

Third, this empire is "worldwide" compared to the Babylonian and Median Empires before it (thus the belly and thighs of bronze in 2:32 are believed to be a perfect description of the Medo-Persian Empire).[7]

The Fourth Kingdom

Finally, the fourth kingdom is interpreted to be Greece (Alexander the Great's empire). According to those who believe this, there are many reasons:

- Alexander's army was invincible, which is consistent with the description of the fourth kingdom (crushing and trampling the others and being terrifying and frightening and very powerful).[8] The Romans were not invincible, as they could not conquer Parthia (Iran).
- Greek culture was very different from the kingdoms that preceded it. This fulfills 7:7, which says the fourth beast "was different from all the former beasts."[9] Rome was very similar to the Greeks before it.
- The Greeks crushed/conquered the first three kingdoms, whereas Rome did not do this (2:40; 7:7).[10]
- The Greek empire was divided into two periods, as Daniel 2:40-43 teaches about the legs of iron and the feet/toes of clay and iron (the beast and the ten horns in chapter 7). The first period was the time of Alexander, in which the kingdom was very strong, and the second period was the era of a divided Greek empire (the Seleucids and Ptolemies) and the multiple intermarriages between them.[11]
- The ten horns that emerge from the fourth kingdom fit very well with the Greeks. By the latter part of the third century BC, ten independent kingdoms had arisen: Ptolemaic Egypt, Seleucia, Macedon, Pergamum, Pontus, Bithynia, Cappadocia, Armenia, Parthia, and Bactria.[12] A second view is that the ten horns are the kings of Syria from Seleucus Nicator (who was the first Seleucid king) to Antiochus Epiphanes (who is believed to be the eleventh horn of Daniel 7 and who persecuted the Jewish people).[13]

- The eleventh horn accords well with two Seleucid kings: Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC) and his father Antiochus the Great (who could be seen as the beginning of the kingdom of the little horn). The latter conquered three of the other kingdoms (7:8, 20, 24), which were Cappadocia, Armenia, and Parthia.[14]
- Daniel 8 and 11 record that "the time of the end" happens with Antiochus Epiphanes' persecution of the Jews. This fits well with Greece being the fourth kingdom.[15]
- The Greek empire immediately preceded the kingdom of heaven. The last remnants of the Greek kingdom (Ptolemaic Egypt) fell to the Romans just a few decades before Christ was born.[16]

Evaluating the Greek theory

Although some may consider these arguments strong, I see some weaknesses in them. First, indeed, some of the details that Daniel gives us about the last three beasts can fit with Media, Medo-Persia, and Greece. However, many of these same details fit well with the Roman and Islamic interpretations as well. For example,

1. The bear being raised up on one side can easily be interpreted as the dominance of the Persians over the Medes.
2. The three ribs in the mouth of the bear could easily be three major conquests of the Medo-Persians, usually identified as Babylon, Lydia, and Egypt.
3. The leopard also fits with Alexander's conquests. Even Daniel 8 records the amazing speed of his conquests, as it says the goat is so quick that its feet do not touch the ground (8:5). Alexander conquered the Persian Empire in only a few short years.
4. Although the power of the fourth beast can describe Alexander's armies, it can also describe the armies of the Islamic Caliphate, which conquered an area much larger than Greece did. These details also match other brutal empires throughout history, like the various Turkic and Mongol empires (which committed genocide in many parts of the world).
5. Although Greece was "different" from the earlier Middle Eastern empires, so was Islam.
6. Greece indeed defeated the same areas as the first three kingdoms (Rome, however, did not do this). Interestingly, Islam also crushed the same area.
7. Islam can also be divided into two periods, as Greece and Rome can. The Caliphate was strong and united from 632-750 AD. Since then, it has been a mixture of strong and weak kingdoms.
8. There were also many intermarriages between different Islamic kingdoms (just like there have been between almost every other kingdom in history).

I am not saying that these details prove the Greek theory wrong, but I'm just noting that many of the arguments put forth to argue for it also fit other theories. However, I do think there are some major problems with the Greek theory:

First, the Medes are said to be inferior to the Babylonians. This can be seen by the relationship between gold (Babylon) and silver (the Medes) in Daniel 2. This causes a huge problem because this would then make the Medo-Persians inferior to the Median Empire. Bronze (the Persians) is inferior to silver in worth. This would also make the Greeks inferior to the Persians because iron is inferior to bronze. The metals in Daniel 2 begin with the best (gold) and end with the least (iron).

However, the metals become more suitable for war as they progress. Silver is better than gold, bronze is a better metal for weapons than silver, and iron is the best of all these metals for war. One of the points of the vision has to do with the empires becoming stronger militarily through time.

Second, the belly and thighs are not a perfect example of the Medo-Persian Empire. In my opinion, the bronze simply fits Greece better. The bronze is divided into two sections – a strong belly, and then the division into two thighs. The belly, or abdomen, is strong and correlates very well with Alexander the Great. The two thighs correspond with the two major divisions of the Seleucids and Ptolemies after the death of Alexander. The bronze section of Daniel 2 fits the Greek empire, whereas the belly splitting into the two thighs does not fit the Medo-Persian Empire. The latter began with both the Medes and Persians as equals, then as time went on, the Persians became dominant. This is the reverse.

Third, the Ten Horns are a huge problem. The ten kings cannot be ten Seleucid kings since Antiochus Epiphanes, thought to be the eleventh king, was the eighth king of that dynasty, not the eleventh. The ten kings seem to be contemporaneous since the eleventh king subdues three of them.

Also, the feet of the statue in Daniel 2 teach that there will be ten kings (ten toes). In my *Daniel 2 essay*, I mentioned that it is possible that the legs and feet can be interpreted as an east-west division of the Greek Empire (the Seleucids and Ptolemaic Egypt). If this is true, then it is logical to think that five kings will arise in the area of the Seleucids, and five will come out of Ptolemaic Egypt (since each foot has five toes). The problem is that the ten nations listed above do not match this. Nine of them lie outside of Egypt, and a few others were not ruled by the Seleucids either.

Fourth, the eleventh horn is another major problem. Those who accept the Greek theory have to split the little horn into two rulers when the context of Daniel 7 makes it only one king. Antiochus Epiphanes did not make three other nations submit to him as Daniel 7 requires, so his father is brought in to help save the theory. Also, the eleventh horn is said to come up among the other ten horns as a contemporary ruler. Seleucia is already one of the ten nations, according to the theory. How can the same nation be two horns?

Fifth, although there are passages in Scripture that point to the arrival of the kingdom of God with the first coming of Christ,[17] many passages have Christ consummating his kingdom after he defeats an enemy known as the man of

lawlessness and the beast. Daniel 7 says that Christ will overthrow the fourth beast to set up his kingdom, and Daniel 2 tells us that the kingdom of God will be set up "in the days of those kings." This did not happen during the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, or any of the Greek kings, for that matter.[18]

Sixth, and lastly, I want to bring up a very controversial interpretation that the Median Empire may not have even existed. There are a lot of details concerning this argument, so I recommend *watching this video*. I am on the fence concerning this theory, but I do believe that it needs to be considered. If true, this may devastate the Greek theory.

Conclusion

Although I am always interested in learning about new theories on biblical prophecy, most of them, including this one, simply fall short. The problems listed above, especially numbers 3-6, make this theory weak in my opinion. I am simply not convinced.

What do you think?

[1] Robert J. M. Gurney, "The Four Kingdoms of Daniel 2 and 7," *Themelios* 2.2 (January 1977): 41-42. Sam Storms. *Kingdom Come* (Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Pub., 2013) 110. John H. Walton, "The Kingdoms of Daniel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29.1 (1986): 30-31.

[2] Gurney, 42.

[3] Gurney, 41-42. Walton, 30-31.

[4] Gurney, 43. Storms, 110. Walton, 30-31.

[5] Gurney, 43. Storms, 110-111.

[6] Gurney, 39, 43-44. Storms 110-111. Walton, 31.

[7] Gurney, 42. Walton, 31.

[8] Gurney, 44. Storms, 111. Walton, 31-32.

[9] Gurney, 44. Storms, 111. Walton, 32.

[10] Gurney, 44. Storms, 111. Walton, 32.

[11] Gurney, 44. Storms, 111.

[12] Storms, 112. Walton, 32-33.

[13] Gurney, 44.

[14] Storms, 111-112. Walton, 33-34.

[15] Storms, 112-113.

[16] Gurney, 39, 40-41, 44. Walton, 35-36.

[17] Gurney (p. 40-41) lists the following passages: Matthew 16:28; 26:64; 28:18; Luke 22:69; Acts 7:56; Romans 8:16, 17; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Ephesians 1:20-22; 2:6; Hebrews 3:1; 1 Peter 3:22; Revelation 1:5, 6; 3:21; 5:9-13; 12:5.

[18] Gurney (p. 40) believes that the Greek Empire was destroyed by the pre-incarnate Christ. There is nothing in the context of Daniel 2 and 7 that gives this impression. It seems that Gurney believes this because the teaching that Christ will set up his kingdom at the destruction of the fourth kingdom becomes a huge problem for his theory.

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